

Congress of the United States

Washington, DC 20515

June 21, 2006

The Honorable Trent Lott
Chairman
Senate Committee on Rules and Administration
SR-305
Washington, D.C. 20510

Dear Senator Lott:

There is little doubt that a crisis of confidence exists in how Congress is perceived by the American people. Recent scandals involving lobbyists and Members of Congress have severely damaged the public's view of their elected representatives, and we have an obligation to do what is necessary to restore their trust.

To date we have done very little to provide greater transparency into the process of influencing our government, or to ensure greater accountability among our public officials. As a member of the conference committee charged with bridging the divide between the Senate and House lobbying reform measures, you have a rare opportunity to make real, substantive, comprehensive lobbying reform a reality.

Neither bill does enough to address the critical need for comprehensive lobbying reform. While each bill contains some provisions to increase lobbyist disclosures and reporting requirements, both bills lack, among other things, imperative enforcement measures. At a time when the public is questioning our integrity, Congress needs to more aggressively enforce its own rules. We should do this not just by making more public the work that the House and Senate Ethics Committees currently undertake, but by addressing the conflict that is inherent in any body that regulates itself.

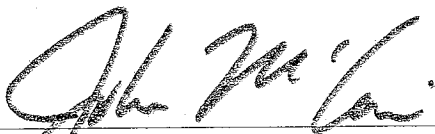
Both the House and the Senate can pass all of the Rules changes they want, but, unless we back them up with a tough enforcement mechanism, they are useless. Therefore, we urge you to consider adopting language to create an Office of Public Integrity. This office should have the ability to investigate complaints of ethical violations by Members of Congress, staff, or officers of either chamber. We believe that the idea of an Office of Public Integrity has great merit. By creating a new office with the capacity to conduct and initiate investigations, we can institute a perspective uncolored by partisan concerns or collegial relationships and address the long-standing structural problems associated with policing ourselves. Regardless of whether each body has its own office, or we worked to create a bicameral post, it is imperative that we show the American people that we are serious about enforcement.

Another critical issue that needs to be addressed in conference is the use of corporate aircraft by Members of Congress. The American public views our ability to travel on corporate

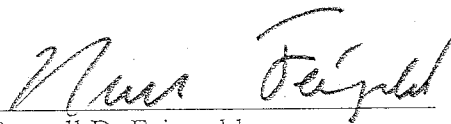
jets, while only reimbursing the first-class rate, as a huge loophole in the current gift rules. And they're right - it is. We need to face the fact that the time has come to end this Congressional perk. There is a public perception that these often lobbyist-arranged flights unduly influence Members of Congress and serve as a way for lobbyists to curry favor with legislators and their aides. We must change that perception by ending Congressional reliance on corporate aircraft by requiring Members and staff to pay the fair market value for travel, rather than merely paying the cost of a first-class ticket.

We, as Members of Congress, owe it to the American people to conduct ourselves in a way that reinforces, rather than diminishes, the public's faith and confidence in the Legislative Branch. An informed citizenry is essential to a thriving democracy. And a democratic government operates best in the disinfecting light of the public eye. We must act now to ensure that the erosion we see today in the public's confidence in Congress does not become a collapse of confidence. We can, and we must, do better than either the Senate or the House bill.

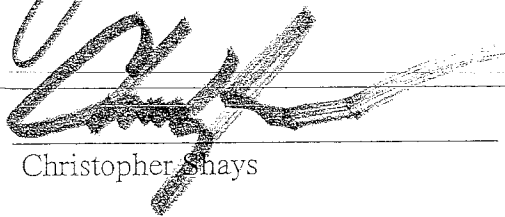
Sincerely,



John McCain



Russell D. Feingold



Christopher Shays



Martin T. Meehan